Always Know What to Say

Easy Ways to Approach and Talk to Anyone

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Published on Smashwords

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How to Use this Book

This book is a how to guide to making conversation with new people. I present ideas, strategies and approaches that can help you only if you apply the techniques.

Make sure to use these principles and ideas out there in the real world. It may take a little trial and error but if you practice you'll see its much easier than most people think to start a conversation with someone you are meeting for the first time. You'll have much more fun talking to people and you'll enjoy letting your personality shine.

Do bear in mind, the strategies presented here are a starting point, you'll need to adjust your application of the individual tips to the context and people you are dealing with. Some flexibility on your part is essential.

Take it a step at a time, aim to improve just a little each day, use these strategies often and make a commitment to ongoing learning with the free resources mentioned in the next section. Before long you'll be one of those people others respect and admire. They'll be wondering how you make conversation so easily!

* * *

Free Conversation Skills Training

I am a firm believer in ongoing education and for that reason I am including two free bonuses with this book that will help you to build great communication skills. You'll also see a link to my Amazon.com author page with links to free resources.

1. 10 Simple Steps to Communication Confidence

I have a very popular audio that covers the 10 steps to building communication confidence - that magnetic quality that makes people want to talk to you and keen to get to know you better.
If you'd like to know how to win the approval, admiration and deep appreciation of anyone you talk to then you'll enjoy listening to this special recording.
This special audio has been downloaded several thousand times over the last few years. Get your free copy at: http://www.freenowtoday.com/

2. Communication Confidence Blog

My blog has hundreds of great articles with practical tips for anyone interested in developing better communication skills, overcoming shyness or building lasting self confidence. You can even add your own comments to let me know what you think of them.
http://www.howtotalkwithconfidence.com/blog/

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Part 1 - What is in the Way of Developing Great Conversation Skills?

In this section we will take a look at what is in the way of your ability to develop good conversation skills. We'll acknowledge where you are right now and simply pay attention to the negative habits that are keeping you stuck and resistant to change. To get the most out of this section you'll need to read it, think about what you've read and then make some new choices for the future.

Even if you are a quiet person or you tend to be quiet when meeting new people this material can help you to become more comfortable and more expressive regardless of who you are talking to.

There are four keys to getting results with this material:

1. Be Aware and Make a Choice

When it comes to personal change the first step is to become aware of what you are doing and why you do it. For example, let's say you rarely approach people. Take an objective look at this behavior and you might notice that you do sometimes but not usually and only when you have a sense of purpose or good reason to. This revelation can then be applied to approach people more often and with less anxiety.

The second step is to choose to change. You don't have to change, it's entirely up to you. What is important is to notice you have a choice and to then decide what you want to do. Do you want to be more sociable? Do you want better conversation skills? Make a clear and definite choice to learn, grow and improve and it will drive all your behavior going forward.

2. Notice Which Negative Habits You Have

For all of the negative habits in this section I'd like you to read through the descriptions of how the habits manifest themselves and then ask yourself does this habit ever apply to you, a little or a lot? This is not about beating yourself up it's about noticing the negative habits that are in place, this is not so much about skills, it's about patterns of inertia that can convince you that your conversation skills are poor when in fact there are other factors which are more problematic.

You'll also notice that some but not all of the habits apply to you, and some apply to a small degree while others are so prevalent in how you deal with people that it seems like that's just the way it is and always has been. Even for habits bear in mind change is possible when you learn a new and better approach.

3. Set New Behavioral Goals

For each of the negative habits, identify if and to what extent it's true for you and then choose, do you want to change or not? If you do, how do you want to be in this context going forward? If you don't want to change, how are you going to handle living with this limitation for the rest of your life?

Once you set your mind on a new objective, once you decide to replace a negative habit with a positive habit you'll gradually get used to behaving differently in those situations where you used to be apathetic and passive. At first it will take some determination and a conscious decision to be more proactive but after a while it will become a new habit, at that point it'll start to seem "normal" and as if you've always been that way.

4. Aim for Step by Step Improvement

Please bear in mind, this book is not light entertainment. If you want results, if you want to quickly improve your conversation skills you need to participate, you need to read the material, think about how it applies to you and exert some effort and determination to practice and apply what you've learnt here out there in the real world. Do not expect instant success with no effort or you'll be disappointed. On the other hand, if you decide to improve surely but consistently through trial and error you will make steady progress. I guarantee it.

We'll now look at the ten common negative habits people often display that can get in the way of developing great conversation skills. Some but not all of these habits will apply to you. As you read through this section pay attention to identify those patterns that determine how and even if you interact with people in your day to day life and that includes friends, family and meeting new people.

* * *

The 10 Negative Habits that Limit Conversation Skills

1. Negative Attitudes

There are a number of ways a negative attitude can cause problems for you when your intention to improve your conversation skills.

People are difficult to talk to

A lot of our opinions, attitudes and beliefs about people are the result of unconscious decisions about the way it is. A few bad experiences can easily be generalized to distort how we view all people not just those difficult few people we occasionally have to deal with. Without even noticing how it happened we assume and eventually believe that it's better to avoid people whenever possible and that it's better to keep your distance with those you talk to on a regular basis.

This is a negative attitude and not the way popular people look at the world. Instead they look for the good in people, enjoy meeting new people and know that, yes, occasionally they'll bump into someone they don't enjoy talking to. However they don't write off everyone because they occasionally bump into some difficult people.

Do you assume most people are difficult to deal with? Do you avoid meeting new people because you worry about what they will think of you? Do you keep to yourself as a way of not dealing with the occasional but rare difficult individual?

Socializing is frivolous

Many people also have a negative attitude about socializing. They may regard it as frivolous or even pointless. You sometimes hear people making excuses about being tired or too busy to socialize when the real reason is unspoken. Few people will admit to their true fears and anxieties, many people prefer to stick to their closest friends over going out to meet new people simply because they hold in mind negative expectations of what will happen when they go to a venue to meet people.

Again, this can be unconscious as it often is with negative attitudes. You may not have even noticed but when you think about attending a party, a wedding or a large gathering of any kind you may be thinking about all the things that could go wrong. You might feel a knot in your stomach and imagine being stuck for words and standing alone in a crowd with no one to talk to you. You might even imagine feeling embarrassed and self-conscious. This is quite an achievement when you think about it, the event hasn't even happened and already you are imagining the worst possible outcome and living that feared consequence as if it's already happened. The thing is, it hasn't happened, nothing bad has happened. All that has happened is that you have not taken charge of your thoughts and feelings.

Ever notice how you think about upcoming opportunities to socialize? Do you think about all that can go wrong? Does this fill you with dread? Do you tend to make excuses to avoid attending social events?

No time to meet people

There is one major difference between quiet people and talkative extroverts. Quiet people often make it a priority to have alone time and time spent on solo activities before everything else. In extreme cases they even fail to schedule time with friends and opportunities to meet new people. Instead they adopt the attitude that it will take care of itself, that they can tag along with friends who organize get togethers. However this rarely works because a pattern often emerges whereby the quiet person says no to offers to socialize with friends because of the priority given to solo activities. There may not be any time left in the schedule to say yes and to head out to meet up with friends and acquaintances.

In contrast, people with busy social lives and great conversation skills do things differently. They switch off the TV and internet and schedule several evenings a week to get out there to meet people, they are typically the first to say yes whenever the party invitations go out and they place a high priority on spending their free time with others. That's not to say you should go to that extreme although it’s good to aim for more balance in how you spend your free time and to place more importance on scheduling time in your week to meet up with friends and family, and to visit new places and to explore new activities.

Do you fail to schedule time each week to meet people? Do you let the week slip by at home when you could be more proactive about getting out there to spend time with friends? If you'd like more balance between time alone and time with others how will you schedule that in the weeks and months ahead?

Socializing is careless spending

What you spend your leisure cash on reveals a lot about what is important to you, it reveals what you value and what gives you enjoyment. And it also represents another opportunity to build closer connections with friends and to get to know interesting new people.

Some people regard spending money on socializing as careless when they can eat, drink and stay entertained at home for less money but that misses the point. When you spend at a bar, cafe or restaurant you are paying for the environment and the meeting place not just the food and drink. You are socializing where there is the possibility of meeting new people and you're making it a special occasion, in fact, you're celebrating the friendships that give you support, companionship and enjoyment. The same applies when you spend money to play sport or to be active in any kind of social club. The real fun and benefit is the friendly environment and opportunity to meet friends and to make new friends. The expenses associated with the activity are incidental. Think about it, a few weeks later, after a great night out with friends, do you even remember what you ate and drank? Of course not but you do remember how much fun you had and you can't wait to do it again.

Do you place a low value on spending money to socialize? Does it seem wasteful to eat out or even to go out for coffee when it’s much cheaper to do it yourself at home? Is it worth it to spend the money and go out a little more if it means you make new friends and get to have fun with the people already in your life?

2. Lack of Purpose

In the context of making conversation a lack of purpose can cause you to be indecisive about what to say and unable to take control of the interaction. There are a number of related issues we need to look at.

No objective when meeting people

Another common habit among people who avoid meeting people and dislike making small talk is the lack of a clearly defined goal for social interactions. This then gives rise to a number of related problems, you are more likely to be self-conscious and second guess what you should say next, you get stuck for words and you dread awkward silences, and you find it hard to pay close attention to what the other person is saying. None of this happens or at least happens in a major way when you know exactly what you want to achieve in the conversation: that singular focus changes everything.

Now, you don't need to do this for every conversation however if you often find small talk stressful at one extreme or boring at the other it can be very helpful to have a clearly defined goal. Why? Because it allows you to focus on what you want to achieve and gives you a direction in which to drive the conversation, doing so keeps your mind busy and less likely to wander. It eases the problems of anxiety and not paying attention which can dominate when you lack a specific conversational goal.

Maybe in the past you've rarely considered having a conversation goal when you meet someone for the first time or when you need to chat with someone you don't know that well. So what can serve as a conversation goal? It can be anything from something as simple as looking for what you have in common to something more involved like asking for opinions, perspectives or insights on local changes in your community that will affect everyone who lives there.

Do you tend to end up in situations where you don't know what to talk about? Do you then randomly jump from one topic to another with no sense of direction? Instead make a point of having a goal for each conversation whether that be to establish and maintain rapport, discover

commonality or to look for shared values and beliefs. When you do this, the conversation will have a direction and life of its own that you simply steer.

No common goals with people

If making conversation ever seems like an uphill battle it's often because there's a lack of cooperation, one person is competing with the other for air time or to win a debate. This can get out of hand very quickly and all it takes is a slight shift in perspective to turn it around.

Always look for what you have in common when you meet people and always be on the lookout for common goals, concerns or worries. When you share a passion or a problem with someone there is ample scope for a lively conversation as you put your minds together to find a solution.

The key is to look for emotional issues, strongly desired goals or highly charged problems. When you find those by listening carefully and pointing out your similar experiences and feelings about the issue it can create a deep connection with the other person. This can bring up intense feelings so if you want to maintain a more low key and relaxed interaction pay more attention to issues that have less emotional involvement.

Let's say you travel to France every year and you meet someone who enjoys French cinema, you have a different but closely connected passion that could fan the flames for a great conversation. The key is to spot potential matches and to speak up to share your passions.

Do you often find conversations to be like a game of ping pong played against someone? Do you tend to have difficulties achieving deep rapport? If you do, aim instead to be on the same team as others by finding common interests you both enjoy or common problems to solve together.

No performance objectives

Another common and limiting habit is that of failing to establish performance objectives. When you are talking to someone you need to know moment to moment how you are doing. You need to constantly adjust your approach to feedback and this can only happen if you have objectives and ways of measuring progress towards or away from them.

Let's say you are finding it difficult to talk to someone, there are awkward silences and all of a sudden the other person excuses himself and walks away. Were there warning signs? Of course there were and it shouldn't have been a surprise that an abrupt conclusion to the conversation was imminent.

What could you do differently to avoid this happening in the future? First of all you need performance objectives or several related small goals that will contribute to ensuring a good conversation. This means dropping a “hope for the best” attitude and taking control of the situation.

Performance objectives would include the decision to give your complete attention to the other person when he is talking, the practice of revealing what you have in common every time the other person talks about a common interest and persistence in searching for common goals.

Do you usually have non-specific hopes for a conversation that can't be defined? Do you often fail to stay on track and lose control of the purpose and direction of the interaction? Instead aim to take charge of the minor but related elements and the whole will take care of itself.

No long term outlook

Another negative habit is taking a short term outlook both when it comes to going out to meet people and when you are engaged in a conversation. When you procrastinate when it comes to meeting people weeks, months or even years pass by and then you wonder why you have a close circle of friends but you know very few people and you feel like you're stuck in the rut of only doing the same few activities with the same few people.

It is much more helpful to take a long term outlook to ensure you have a happy and busy social life filled with people you enjoy talking to. This means saying yes more often and attending social functions because little by little you'll meet great people and gradually build up a great network of good friends. If you don't do this the inevitable happens, people move to a new neighborhood, others get promoted at work and have less free time, while some get overwhelmed by their busy family lives. The end result is the same, over the years, you'll know fewer and fewer people to meet up with unless you are always looking forward and aiming to find great people to meet.

People with lots of good friends look to the future. They see social functions as the ideal opportunity to meet their friends and to make new friends not just for right now but for years to come. They view conversations as much more than small talk because of this perspective, each chat is part of a much bigger picture and a fun way to get to know more great people, people to enjoy getting to know over time.

Do you fail to look beyond the immediate conversation when you meet someone? Do you avoid social functions because it’s just one evening you're missing? Instead see each conversation and each gathering as a way to meet great people you can enjoy getting to know for years to come.

3. Overlook Importance of Social Connections

Quiet, independent people sometimes overlook how important social connections are for general well being and happiness. This oversight has implications we need to consider.

Not looking for more friends

Let's take a look now at another attitude that gets in the way of developing great conversation skills. This is the outlook that you already have enough friends so why put yourself out there to meet more people? This is the kind of apathy that can also infect your current friendships, before you know it you can get lazy about making time for good friends and fail to be completely present when you do meet them.

When it comes down to it the “have enough friends already” outlook misses one important distinction. The happiest times in your life tend to have one key factor in common - shared experiences with people you care about. Given that this is the case it makes sense to make happiness a priority and to do that by making a point of always making the effort to meet more like minded people and to deepen the friendships you already have by being a better listener, by sharing more of yourself and by not taking it all for granted.

Popular people already know that the happiest times in their lives typically involve their friends and family. They cultivate great friendships and make a point of getting to know new people. It's a key part of how they live and how they plan their week by making time to be with people.

Do you ever think you have enough friends already? Do you take some of your friends for granted and fail to make the effort to see them? See that happiness in large part comes down to spending time with great people and aim to do more of that.

Meeting people is a low priority

A related issue is the decision to avoid meeting people. If you cram your schedule with work, domestic chores and solo activities you'll never have enough the opportunity to enjoy time with friends and to get to know new people. You'll be the one who is often saying no to social invitations and eventually people will stop asking you.

The reason this happens has nothing to do with not having enough time, it comes down to not making it a priority to spend time with people and a failure to appreciate how important time with good friends is for a happy life. The busyness argument is an excuse that is used to avoid facing up to the fact that you have fears and worries about getting to know people and you feel more comfortable avoiding the issue. The problem with this approach is that you become more isolated over time and it then becomes even harder to break out of your shell.

An attitude change is essential, unless you make it a priority to meet friends, friends of friends and new people each week it'll rarely happen and only by chance. With less practice at making conversation whatever skills you have will decline and it becomes even more difficult to turn it around.

Do you fail to make it a priority to meet new people? Do you lose touch with friends because you don't initiate contact? Could you start making happiness a priority by socializing more with people you enjoy being with?

Excessive alone time

Spending time alone is great for recharging and for finding the space to think, and for quiet people it's essential because dealing with people all day at work and at home can be draining, time alone is the antidote to all of that. However even a good thing can go too far. If you spend too much time alone you'll eventually feel detached from other people and from life. Being alone is a frame of mind that becomes comfortable and relatively stress free so even the prospect of socializing can seem like too much effort.

For this reason I encourage you to aim for balance. Notice how much alone time you need and at what point it becomes destructive and a barrier to living a full life. Excessive TV or internet usage can fall into this category too. If you are failing to have regular and in depth face to face conversations with people because you interact online you will never develop great conversation skills. There is no substitute for talking to people "offline" out there in the real world with all the complexities, issues and day to day realities that come with a face to face interaction.

Do you spend too much time alone? Could you have more balance between being alone and with others? Do you mistake online interactions with the depth, connection and challenges of talking to new people offline?

Procrastinating about meeting people

This is the final issue we need to address in this section. I am referring to a negative habit of putting things off when it comes to seeing friends or attending social events. When we live like this we don't even notice our avoidance tendencies because we are still saying yes to opportunities to meet people but we simply procrastinate and make it someday but someday often never comes.

Instead we think we are socially active and a good friend but we're just too busy right now. This again is a case of not appreciating how important human interaction is for your ongoing happiness. Spending time with people who like you and care about you is essential for your well being while meeting like minded people keeps you connected to all the joy, variety and wonder of life. Life is richer, brighter and more colorful with great people to share the journey.

However at times apathy, laziness and subtle fears about talking to people can cause us to get into the habit of putting off social engagements, rescheduling them until the other person can't make it or making up excuses for not turning up. The best way to deal with this is by being honest with yourself, if you want to go to a social event make a definite commitment to your friends and aim to never let them down. Don't let social fears get in the way of enjoying the happiness and connection you have with people you enjoy talking to. The same applies to going to new places and visiting new venues - if you want to go then do it but don't procrastinate and pretend you really will go but not today.

Do you put off meeting up with friends? Do you lose touch with people because you are always too busy to meet? Do you avoid or postpone new experiences because of having to deal with people? If you do, could you face the fear and go anyway instead of hiding behind the fear with procrastination?

4. Conversation Fear

Perhaps the most common reason given for avoiding people is what I like to call conversation fear. Quiet people use this excuse all the time not realizing that apparently confident people also have fears to deal with, the only difference being that more socially active people build confidence and learn to control fear through practice, trial and error, and by sheer determination.

Sensitive to criticism

Of all the fears that stop people speaking up fear of criticism is probably the most prevalent. We fear criticism so we conclude it’s better not to say anything but unfortunately when you don't speak up you may be criticized or ignored for not speaking. So you see a certain level of criticism is unavoidable, the key is to decide how you handle it because you cannot completely avoid people who will voice critical opinions of you and your viewpoint. Remember, what others say may be right or they may be wrong so don't automatically see all criticism as valid and worth responding to with a justification.

Are you overly sensitive to criticism? Do you realize that everyone has to deal with criticism? Remember to ask yourself: is this criticism valid or invalid?

Fear of rejection

Everyone can relate to the fear of rejection. Yes, even those confident and successful people you admire secretly worry about rejection. It's not a concern that's exclusive to quieter people so regard this fear as a normal characteristic we all share as part of our basic nature.

A better way to look at meeting people is to look for matches, that is to look for people you have something in common with instead of wanting to be liked by everyone. This one shift in attitude takes a lot of pressure off and allows you to accept that there will be matches and non-matches and it's all perfectly normal, and as you improve your conversation skills you'll have more matches, even so, never expect 100%.

Do you fear rejection like everyone does? Could you focus on finding matches instead? Could you approach someone (who also fears rejection) and be good company?

Poor selection of social events

Poor event selection is a way of setting yourself up for failure before you even open your mouth to introduce yourself. If you habitually go to social gatherings where you know no one and you have little or no interest in the activity your starting point is likely to be one of boredom, disinterest and an obvious lack of connection with whoever you meet. Even very skilled conversationalists will find such an environment to be challenging. Again, be kind to yourself and choose more carefully when you have a choice of where to go and who to socialize with. Pursue your passions, go to events with your kind of people and you'll be starting with your best foot forward and an eagerness to talk to like minded people about common interests.

Do you often go to events you have little interest in? Could you make a point of choosing events you'd enjoy attending and trust you'll meet like minded people with shared interests? Could you see social gatherings in a positive light when you take charge of what to attend and who to meet?

Poor selection of people

This final issue is the matter of choosing the wrong targets. If you randomly approach and talk to anyone at a social event you'll get random and often poor results when it comes to getting a good conversation flowing. Many people will do this when they feel nervous and rush to talk to someone, to talk to anyone, rather than feel self-conscious standing there alone in a crowded room.

It’s far better to take a moment to scan the room, look at who is available and choose the most likely best match to talk to. i.e. someone who looks happy, friendly, relaxed and of a similar background to you. When you become more selective about who to talk to your success rate will improve dramatically and over time as your skills improve you'll have a wider range of people you can confidently approach. The key is to take charge of the situation rather than hoping for the best and acting out of fear and nervousness.

Remember, very few people feel completely comfortable approaching people they don't know so don't regard nerves as a sign you are ineffective or failing. It's perfectly natural to feel some excitement, just turn that into movement before you get stuck to the spot and caught up in over analysis of the situation. If you delay you'll find so many reasons not to approach someone that fear will take over, you'll revert to talking to whoever is nearby and end up forcing a conversation that has no future with someone who is a mismatch for you.

Do you often avoid approaching people and hope no one notices how awkward you feel? Do you know it’s perfectly normal to have nerves, even for socially active people? Could you make a point of choosing good potential matches and focus on only approaching those people?

5. Feeling Unresourceful

When it comes to meeting people it is extremely important to ensure you feel at your best however there are a number of negative habits that can make this difficult to achieve.

Expecting the worst

What's the biggest difference between someone with an active social life and someone who dreads heading out in the evening to meet people? Often, it's a big difference in expectations. The outgoing

and sociable person looks forward to the event, thinks about what she's going to wear, talks to her friends about the upcoming event and expects to have a great time, she can hardly wait.

On the other hand, the quiet person who often avoids social gatherings dreads the prospect of the upcoming event, doesn't mention it to anyone except to complain about the inconvenience and expects to have an unpleasant time surrounded by people she doesn't really want to talk to.

Clearly, the biggest difference is one of attitude. The same event will be approached and dealt with in two very different ways by someone who looks forward to it and by someone who dreads it. Often, where it's an option, it's better to skip events you don't want to attend but don't pretend you don't want to go because of fear. If fear is the issue it will not go away and may even get worse if you don't improve your social skills by practicing.

One useful way of preparing is by deciding to find ways to enjoy the event. Who would you like to meet? Any particular people or types of people? Is there anything you'd enjoy experiencing, learning or discussing?

Replaying past failures

This is the ultimate way to convince yourself you have poor social skills and that you'll never be any good at dealing with people. In fact, replaying past social failures again and again is the perfect formula for cultivating a fear of embarrassment and an all round self-consciousness that takes control of your life.

This is the opposite of what socially confident people do, they habitually replay successful encounters and operate from the belief that they have excellent social skills. They play down failures and mistakes as minor and inconsequential, they learn from them but don't dwell on them.

All you can do about past failures is look at them objectively and ask yourself: what will you do differently in the future? Decide to learn from those experiences and then let go of the self-punishment which is helping no one but keeping you apart from people who would enjoy getting to know you.

Do you tend to replay past social failures with attached emotions? Could you decide to learn from the past and let go of the utterly pointless self-punishment? What will you do differently in similar situations in the future?

No exit plan

In any social interaction you need an exit plan, you need to know when and how to end the conversation and make a polite exit. Often, socially nervous people neglect this and so when there is a lull in the conversation or the conversation has reached a natural conclusion they force the conversation, get anxious and wonder why they have such poor conversation skills when in fact they were doing very well until they got to that point.

It takes tremendous pressure off your shoulders when you know you can approach someone and talk for a few minutes to see if you have a good match and if you don't it's perfectly acceptable to move on and talk to someone else. Some people don't look at it like this and think if they approach someone and don't have an engaging 40 minute conversation they have failed to be accepted and liked. This is a recipe for fear of rejection, fear of failure and self-consciousness.

Do what confident socially active people do, talk to a whole range of people and accept that some interactions are short, some are long, and all you can do is chat and look for good matches. This outlook changes everything, it means you never again have to worry about getting stuck in a boring, dead end conversation and you never have to stand there feeling awkward wishing you could disappear into the floor. Instead, you can be the director of your own social life - choose who to talk to, how long to talk and what to talk about. The key is deciding upfront you have an exit and being ready to use it.

Do you tend to get stuck in dull conversations and wish there was a way out? Do you often let the other party end the conversation and hope it'll end soon? Could you instead know your exit and use it whenever you choose to?

Lack of motion

Standing or sitting in one place for the duration of a social event is a typical habit of a quiet person. He'll get comfortable in one spot and refuse to move around the room because he feels safe and unthreatened in his corner of the room. He then hopes he'll meet someone interesting who will take charge of the conversation and let him off the hook so he won't have to initiate conversations with anyone else for the duration of the event.

The big challenge with this approach is that you're hoping and waiting for things to work out and not taking charge so you'll often end up stuck with someone who won't stop talking or you'll end up alone and bored making small talk with whoever is nearby merely out of convenience not because you have a good match.

This is not what socially successful people do. Instead they circulate, they move around the venue for the duration of the event, they scan the group and look for good matches, they then approach those people and make light conversation. If the conversation goes deeper and longer they soak it up, if not, they move on and talk to someone else. They actively avoid parts of the room where people appear bored, lifeless and disinterested. In other words, they proactively go to the people most likely to engage in an enjoyable conversation.

So, you can see why selecting the right people to talk to is more important than having something to talk about - you can bring a horse to water but you can’t make him drink!

Do you tend to camp out in one location when you socialize? Do you now see how that limits the ease and success you'll have finding good matches for free flowing conversation? Could you in future circulate more and focus on meeting good matches for conversations?

6. Limited Opportunities for Practice

When it comes to conversation skills people with scope for improvement often share the same problem, they simply don’t get enough practice and without more time spent meeting people it is very difficult to get better. Let’s look at what you can do about this.

Rarely meet new people

If you can relate to the points I've made already it's highly likely you avoid meeting new people or at the very least don't make a point of meeting new people each week. Again, this is the opposite of what people with good social skills do. And, not surprisingly there is a natural consequence to this habit - people who rarely meet new people have less practice maintaining and improving social skills while socially active people maintain a high degree of skill and a high degree of confidence

and readiness to socialize with friends and strangers alike. Over many years this results in one person being shy, cautious and unsure of what to say while another is confident, outgoing and liked by a wide range of people because of how easy it is to talk to him.

If you tend to keep to yourself and your small network of friends and family you'll be safe and comfortable in your own world but you'll never have sufficient opportunities to practice and develop your social skills and you won't have enough chance encounters to meet good matches, people you can build life long friendships with. So, the solution to great conversation skills is quiet obvious when you look at it like this, you need to regard meeting new people as a positive experience: a way to meet matches and a way to develop your social skills based on a self-confidence that's unshakeable because it's based on skills not pretense.

Do you avoid meeting new people? How will you improve your conversation skills without practicing? Could you view meeting people as the way to gradually developing confidence?

Sticking with friends

A related habit is sticking to what you know and who you know. While it's great to have an established group of close friends and familiar places you enjoy it can become so comfortable that you choose to avoid visiting new places whether that be different social venues, towns and cities, or even countries. Over time you can become overly cautious and set in your ways, this creeping normality then becomes the only way you live - you only go to a narrow range of places, and have the same conversations with the same group of people. While this is very comfortable and familiar it can also mean you are stuck in a rut.

If you want to expand your social life and cultivate social skills and confidence there is no avoiding the reality of what needs to be done - you need to sacrifice some of that established routine with the same friends and open your eyes to new places to go and new people to talk to. At first, this can seem daunting so it's best to make the changes slowly and gradually. Maybe visit a new cafe or a new restaurant with a good friend just to change your typical routine. Then, another time you might sign up for an adult education course to learn a new skill you are interested in as well as to meet new people.

Start small, maintain your existing social circle, and over time proactively do new things to meet new people and you'll find you get used to having new experiences to look forward to and eventually you'll find it exhilarating rather than nerve wracking.

Do you spend most or all of your free time in the security of your established social circle and routine? Do you see how you are limiting the possibilities of meeting new people? Will you make a point of going to new places to meet new people either with or without a friend to tag along?

Avoid new places

While I touched on this issue in the last section I want to cover this in more detail because sticking with the familiar is a typical habit of the shy and socially timid. When you get into an established routine and only go to certain stores, cafes, restaurants and only vacation in certain destinations or types of resort life can seem very comfortable and safe but inadvertently you're weakening your ability to handle novelty and you're losing your natural ability to handle new situations and new people. For this reason it's important for anyone looking to develop great social skills to mix it up a little.

Get in the habit of having new experiences in your life on a weekly basis. You don't have to go it alone either, take a friend or partner with you but do make a point of getting used to experiencing and adapting to new situations and people. When you do, you'll become more flexible in how you deal with people and more open to positive new encounters, you'll lose rigid ideas about how people should behave and it gets easier and easier to adapt to whatever crops up during a conversation.

Again, it should be no surprise that this is exactly what socially confident people do, they get way more practice than a shy person and that's the main reason why they have such good people skills. There's nothing magical about it and thankfully you can copy their approach and improve your conversation skills little by little and even have a lot of fun going to new places and doing new things at the same time.

Do you tend to stick to your routine and avoid visiting new places? Could you make a point of introducing more variety into your life? Could you treat practice as essential to building good social skills?

7. Limited Range of Conversation Topics

This is a classic problem for people who tend to get tongue tied when they meet people. They simply don't have a wide enough range of topics to explore but there is something that can be done about this. Read on...

Narrow range of interests

People with very little to talk about usually make the same fundamental mistake that has nothing to do directly with their conversation skills yet it stops conversation dead in its tracks.

It's the over focus on a limited number of interests that means only a narrow range of people can engage with you. This can happen innocently enough for people who are especially passionate about their main interests but it causes problems that can't be resolved by learning strategies for making conversation because there is no underlying material to use to make conversation.

To immediately expand your range of conversation possibilities it's important to be more focused on what other people enjoy talking about. Follow pop culture, read mainstream fiction, go to popular movies and stay up to date with the current issues most people are talking about. Do this, not because you are especially interested but because it makes you easier to talk to and it makes it much easier for you to interact with a far wider range of people. This is about being generous and a more rounded conversationalist who can enjoy spending time with people instead of being the odd one out who cannot relate to other people.

Do you ignore mainstream interests and current issues that people discuss? Do you focus almost exclusively on what interests you? Could you be more generous and choose to know a little about what others like to talk about.

Not up to date with local happenings

This factor is related to the previous point about a general lack of interest in what others like to discuss. The fact is most people pay attention to and like to talk about what is happening in their community. They want to know about upcoming events, local news and changes in their local area. If you ignore what is happening where you live and neglect to stay up to date you lose another great way to connect with people.

You might again decide that you're not that interested but that is not the point, the point is everyone else is interested in what is going on in the community. Again, this is about choosing to know a little about what others find interesting. This is not about thinking only about your narrow range of interests that excludes most people from talking to you and getting to know you.

If you pay attention to how socially successful people interact you'll see that they can talk about a wide range of topics because they care about getting to know people, they may have limited interest in a particular topic but that's not the point, the point is they choose to be flexible about what they can and will talk about so that they can talk to just about anyone. You can choose to do the same.

Do you pay little attention to local happenings? Can you talk about a wide range of local issues? Could you choose to be better informed on local matters so you can have a ready supply of conversation topics?

Lack of curiosity

This is a key issue for people who get nervous about meeting new people and wonder about what to say. They think too much about what to say and how to say it when the real goal is to get to know someone or get to know someone better. The conversation is a means to an end not the end itself.

If the goal of a conversation is to get to know someone then establishing a connection is what it's all about. To do this you need to know and like whoever you are talking to and this in turn is driven by curiosity. When you want to know someone's opinions, feelings and perspective that curiosity drives the conversation and makes the connection happen. And this is why a general curiosity for people is very helpful.

If you don't care what someone thinks and have little interest in their viewpoint this will be very obvious to them, it will make them slow to share their opinions and quick to end the conversation. It creates the perfect environment for awkward silences, misunderstandings and a failure to listen. This is a case of a lack of curiosity giving way to a breakdown.

Do you lack an interest in finding out what people think and have to say about issues you discuss? Could you not care less what someone is really like? Could you decide to be more curious about what makes people tick?

Slow to share opinions

Quiet people are often hesitant to share their feelings and opinions because they fear criticism, although this is understandable it creates a bigger and more immediate problem. When you don't share a little about yourself you prevent the other person from getting to know you and you make it hard for them to move the conversation along onto topics of mutual interest because you are not feeding them any clues and pointers as to what you are interested in and like talking about. This also makes it hard for people to connect with you and to relate to you as the unique person you are behind the carefully constructed but unintentionally bland facade you've carefully constructed.

The key is to share a little about who you are and what you enjoy, nothing too personal, just enough to help everyone in the conversation to establish common interests and experiences that can become the basis of an engaging conversation. With a little practice you'll see the positive impact a little personal disclosure makes possible.

Socially active people are the perfect role model for this behavior, they always have personal stories and anecdotes to share for entertainment purposes and to let people get to know them. This one factor changes everything as people see you as a three dimensional person they can relate to.

Do people find it hard to get to know you? Are you slow to share personal information? Could you make a point of sharing opinions and thoughts that allow people to get to know you?

8. Reactive Behavior

Quiet people habitually let others take charge, they get so used to reacting to what everyone else is saying that they forget they can choose to be more assertive and to lead the conversation. This is an important skill to learn.

Never initiate gatherings

This is a classic habit of people who have an aversion to socializing, they rarely if ever arrange get togethers with friends, they don't bring the party to their home and they don't arrange a lot of group activities. They tend to go along with what has already been organized by their friends even if they'd prefer to do something different, they don't speak up and suggest alternatives and instead passively follow along with everyone else. Then they get agitated or seem disinterested because they are in fact bored and don't enjoy the gathering because it's not what they really wanted to do.

Popular people on the other hand do the very opposite. They decide what they'd like to do and find some friends who would enjoy the same activity. This way the instigator knows he will have a good time and looks forward to the event, socializing becomes fun and he wants to do more of it not avoid it. The key is to sometimes be the one who takes charge and leads everyone else, by doing this you get to be the one who designs the day out or evening with friends, once you get the hang of this you'll see socializing as the high point of the week not as a series of boring events you'd rather miss.

Do you tend to be reactive about meeting friends? Do you rarely organize social gatherings? Could you decide to be more proactive about driving your social life?

Rarely approach new people

Another classic reactive pattern is the tendency to rarely if ever approach people. “Only speak when spoken to” may or may not have sounded like a good motto when we were children but as adults if everyone does that no one would ever talk to anyone. This waiting and hoping someone else will take the initiative has a number of pitfalls. It means you can potentially get stuck in dull conversations with people you don't really want to talk to simply because they approached you and you are unable, because of fear, to slide away to approach and talk to someone else.

When confident socializers look around a room they see possibility, they look for interesting and friendly people to talk to and they quickly move on over there to speak to that person that caught their eye. But you miss out on the best conversations when you play a passive role and hope someone else will take the lead. If you're lucky you'll end up talking to someone interesting, if you're not, you'll end up alone or stuck with people you don't want to spend much time with. Bear in mind, conversation skills are secondary, who you talk to is more important when it comes to having a great conversation.

If you choose easy targets, people who appear happy and relaxed, it's much easier than you think to meet new people. Avoid the clearly stern or difficult people and you'll rarely have to deal with the nightmare scenarios you might sometimes worry about.

Do you rarely start conversations with people you don't know? Are you interested in meeting friendly people? Could you decide to selectively approach apparently happy people?

Always waiting for the right moment

Another common issue that arises with a passive approach to meeting people is that you spend your life waiting and hoping instead of doing what you'd really like to be doing. This is a very limited experience of life, you stop asking yourself what you want and simply wait to see what shows up.

There are many problems with this approach and typically it means you end up getting involved in social activities you don't want to attend, you socialize with people you don't want to meet and so you often feel bored and dissatisfied. You then start to avoid opportunities to socialize and arrive at the mistaken conclusion that you don't enjoy meeting people at all when this is in fact incorrect.

The only problematic issue here is one of passivity. You need instead to decide what you want and go for it. Who do you want to spend time with and what activities would you enjoy? Would you like to meet new people with common interests and values? Where would this happen?

Not surprisingly, this is exactly what people with active social lives do, they focus on activities they enjoy with people they enjoy talking to. Clearly, taking charge is the key.

Reluctance to take control

One final drawback of the reactive approach to interacting with people is the tendency to not control and direct the conversation. Quiet people often let others take charge and end up talking about whatever everyone else wants to discuss, you then end up being pushed one way and then another based on the whims of whoever is driving the conversation.

As a quiet person you may often feel bored and unappreciated in conversation, you wonder why you bother to meet people and you feel dissatisfied and ready to go home to do something more enjoyable. This is completely understandable but the problem is one of attitude rather than just poor conversation technique.

When you are actively involved in a conversation you have a choice, let the other person take charge and react to whatever happens or decide to be proactive and drive the conversation. This is a slight shift in attitude but the consequences are significant. With this new outlook you can choose to introduce new topics, change the direction of the conversation and even end it if you prefer.

When you are proactive you'll be more energetic and more engaged in the conversation as an active participant rather than as a sounding board. You'll get to choose topics of interest to you and you'll have the satisfaction that comes from creating a mutually enjoyable conversation with your companion.

Do you habitually let other people take charge of the conversation? Would you like to talk more about what interests you? Could you make a point of being more proactive so all parties can enjoy a mutually satisfying interaction?

9. Timid Lifestyle

Over time many people become cautious and stuck in their own ways, they get used to being on the outside, close to the action but never in the thick of things. Often, shyness takes over and leaves them driven by fear and doubt. This is a lingering problem we need to address head on.

Rarely attend group events

A timid lifestyle often starts in an innocent way, you say no to an invitation to a party, you're too busy to attend a gathering and before long you rarely get invited anywhere but not because people don't like you but because they see that you're reluctant to meet people and you prefer to avoid crowds.

What happens next can be a much bigger problem, you're out of the loop so you no longer hear about what events are happening and you gradually become isolated. When this happens it can seem like a difficult and very stressful ordeal to get involved again in your social circles.

Sometimes it's good to go to social events to stay in touch in people even when you have some reservations based on social fears. Stay socially active so that you don't lose your connections with your current friends or lose the opportunity to meet more like minded people. Remember, the social activity is not the primary function of the event, the main reason to attend is to be part of the social scene, to see other people and to be seen by them, to be in the right place at the right time to hear about other events that may suit you better.

Of course I still believe it's good to be selective and choose events you'll enjoy just be sure you don't go to an extreme and say no to most opportunities to meet people. That can be a case of fear making the decision with “I’m too busy!” given as the excuse for not going.

Do you often say no to social events? Do you avoid large group gatherings? Could you decide to be more socially active to stay in the loop?

Habitual patterns of socializing

Although most people do it, spending your free time with the same people and only going to the same places can be a dead end. If you enjoy variety and new experiences make sure to take control and suggest new venues, new activities and new places to visit. That excitement alone can be enough to ignite great conversations with everyone enthusiastic about the new sights and sounds. This is a great basis for suggesting further excursions and for planning ahead for friends and family to join you.

The same applies to the people you spend your time with. Instead of waiting and hoping to meet new and like minded people why not get your friends to invite their friends along to join your activities? This is another simple way to break out of the rut of always doing the same things with the same people.

Do you get bored of the routine of only seeing the same people? Do you crave more variety in where you go and what you do in your free time? Could you take charge of going to new places and meeting new people by leading your friends?

Avoiding the new and unknown

In an earlier section I talked about the importance of seeing new places and doing new things as a way of developing flexibility and the ability to adapt to new situations and people. Now, I want to address the fear that underlies avoiding the new and unknown.

Quiet people very often avoid the new and unknown because they feel safe in their day to day routine. There are less people challenges to deal with and they can avoid dealing with people they don't know if they stay safe in their own world.

This seems like the comfortable choice but again it's fear of people that is making the decision and your world gets smaller and quieter the more you listen to the fear. Plus, the more you stick to your established routine, the harder it becomes to try new things and to meet new people. What was once a little uncomfortable at times can over time seem like a huge and insurmountable challenge that you can't deal with. For this reason it's good to realize that the long term consequences of avoiding change, new experiences and new people can be far more serious than dealing with the trial and error that is needed when interacting in the real world.

Feelings of isolation and not being understood will become common place if you fail to embrace opportunities to enjoy the new and the possibility of meeting people you can connect with.

In contrast, popular people actively seek out new experiences, new venues and new people. Those socially confident people you see also have fears of rejection and embarrassment to deal with but it doesn't stop them getting out there to meet people.
The only difference is their determination to focus on the positives that out weight any awkwardness they may feel from time to time.

Do you avoid new experiences because you don't know what to expect? Do you let conversation fear override the possibility of meeting great people? Could you decide to take small risks in opening up to new experiences and new people?

Never lead the group

Quiet people rarely if ever lead the social group. They prefer to stay in the background, agree with the consensus opinion and do anything to avoid rocking the boat. This is not a bad course of action most of the time but if you never express your own opinions and never, ever lead the group then you may become taken for granted. You become someone who everyone can count on to go along with the group, which is good, but at the same time your objections or voice is rarely heard or acknowledged by the other members of your social circle.

This is not a situation that allows you to express yourself or feel valued and appreciated for your unique input. However you can make small changes over time to become a more involved and respected member of the group. Start by expressing your opinion more often, speak up more than you have in the past on minor issues of discussion and especially regarding matters you have knowledge and experience of. Once your friends have adjusted to your newly expressive and more involved persona you can occasionally lead the group, again, on minor matters.

At this point you might be comfortable with the progress you have made now that you are a more active and leading member of your social circle. If that is the case it's perfectly acceptable to settle into that new role, relax and enjoy time with your friends. Whatever you do, don't push to be more of a leader and driver of the group than you want to be, find a balance between being involved and suiting your quiet personality.

Do you tend to take the back seat and let friends take charge? Do you feel ignored and unappreciated? Could you gradually get more involved, speak up more and contribute more?

10. Inadequate Preparation

Socially active people turn up ready to have a good time when they attend a social event, they dress well, have plenty to talk about and they are in a good state of mind for meeting people. This is often the complete opposite of what socially awkward people do, they just turn up and hope for the best and then wonder why they get stuck for words. It doesn't have to be like this.

Lack of conversation topics

A lot of what we have covered already leads us to the obvious but overlooked conclusion that quiet people get less practice meeting people and often turn up unprepared to discuss a wide range of topic with the people they do end up talking to. And this is why I stressed the importance earlier of taking a different view of what a conversation is about - making conversation with someone you don't know is all about discovering if this person is a good match, a potential long term friend. With this is mind you need to prepare for conversation before the social event rather than hoping to wing it when you're tense and nervous at the gathering.

Professionals are known for putting the time in when it comes to preparation, a dancer will practice for months for a two hour performance, an actor will memorize lines and rehearse for months before appearing on stage. When you see the stars perform in front of the camera it looks like magic, they are so talented, they just turn up and dazzle everyone with their performance. What you don't see is the dedication to practice and the dedication to extensive and comprehensive preparation before a big event.

There is a lesson in this for all of us, to improve and to excel we need to practice and we must prepare before the pressure of the moment kicks in. If you'll make a point of having a ready supply of current topic to discuss and if you'll practice at home before you go out to socialize you'll get better and better over time.

Do you often find yourself on the spot with no idea of what to talk about? Could you make a point of being current on a wide range of topics? Could you decide to always prepare before going to a social gathering?

Unprepared for meeting people

If you turn up at a gathering and hope for the best it is much more stressful than turning up knowing what to expect. If you are often nervous about social events, you could research the event beforehand. Find out what the venue looks like and as much as possible about the show, performance or event. The more informed you are the more you'll know what to expect and the less anxiety you'll have about walking into the unknown.

It's also good to anticipate the crowd you'll be part of. Consider who you know who is attending: friends, friends of friends and the type of people you'll meet. This information will then guide your preparation so you'll have interesting and suitable conversation topics to lead with. The more you prepare by removing uncertainty and doubt about the kind of people you'll meet the more comfortable you'll be about meeting people.

Do you usually worry about meeting people at social events? Do you feel out of control of what will happen? Could you decide to be aware of who and what kind of people you'll meet before going to an event? What do they like to talk about?

Poor dress sense

While we have focused on attitude and interactions so far it is important to mention how important it is to dress appropriately and well when meeting people. Although we might sometimes forget, the clothes you wear affect how you feel about yourself and can boost or lower your self-confidence. We've all had the experience of wearing an item of clothing we absolutely love and feeling fantastic every time we wear it.

When it comes to how you dress you want to make it your goal to look your best and feel at your best. You want to avoid wearing anything that makes you feel self-conscious because of the fit or the unflattering nature of the garment. Instead, over time fill your wardrobe with clothes that suit you and boost your confidence.

Dressing well also has other benefits. You'll receive compliments from people you meet, your posture will be better and people will take you more seriously. You'll be listened to more and your opinion respected more simply because you dress well. For these reasons it's important not to take for granted the importance of dressing for conversation success.

Do you often dress for comfort rather than to make a good impression? Do you neglect to dress in a way that boosts your confidence? Could you include dressing well as part of your preparation for successful socializing?

Physical comfort overlooked

Meeting new people can be stressful enough so we want to do everything we can to minimize other stressors that add to our nerves and worries about socializing. Consequently it's advisable to eat well, get sufficient rest and avoid last minute rushing when you have an important and imminent social function to attend.

You want to be physically strong and mentally calm, that way you can focus on conversation without the extra nerves that a tired body can add to the mix. If you enjoy exercise, working out is a great way to stimulate and then relax your body while giving you a calm mind. Staying fit and healthy will give you the energy you need to enjoy socializing, to be completely present with people and the mental flexibility to adapt to a wide variety of people and topics.

For people who practice meditation, meditating is one of the best ways to calm your mind before getting involved in a situation that involves some stress. Even twenty minutes of meditation before meeting people will dramatically reduce the tension you feel and give you the mental clarity to enjoy the moment instead of over thinking all the things that could go wrong.

Do you get anxious and nervous when meeting people? Do you tend to overlook the role the body has in raising or lowering situational stress? Could you in future get your body on your side to ensure greater self-confidence and less nerves?

We’ve now reached the end of this breakdown of the ten negative habits that limit conversation skills. Make sure to read through this section again and devise a plan of action to make changes in those areas where you have scope for improvement. Aim for gradual but consistent progress and

you'll surprise yourself at how quickly your conversation skills will improve. In fact, the very next section will help you to ensure steady progress.

* * *

The Love and Connection Daily Practice

For a long time I've been fascinated by people who effortlessly mix with new people, make great conversation and still manage to relax and enjoy the moment. If only we could all do this! Well, the good news is that we can be better, much better at connecting with people, we can be more comfortable expressing ourselves and we can make a great impression on other people once we become more accepting of ourselves and others.

It all comes down to taking charge of how you feel and think when you are socializing. If you feel happy, relaxed and positive then it's much easier to talk freely and confidently without self doubt tripping you up. And that's why I designed the Love and Connection Daily Practice, to give you a simple way to make steady progress in how you manage your emotional state while also allowing you to become more comfortable being yourself when you connect with other people. And yes, if you take a few minutes daily to follow this simple daily practice you'll get better and better at connecting with people.

One word of warning. This daily practice goes deeper than a set of tried and tested conversation starters, it goes to the heart of what makes for great conversation skills, it's the source that ignite friendships and relationships with the authentic energy that gets people talking and enjoying time together. Still, these fundamentals are not exotic, they're not mysterious and they're not complicated. For these reasons many people will miss the value of the daily practice. The magic is in practicing for a few minutes a day and enjoying the sure but steady progress that results in how you feel about yourself and others. It's similar to how people might react when they see a movie star with the perfect body, they admire the end result but they don't really want to see the simple fundamentals of daily exercise and diet that produced the magical results.

Be brave, take a few minutes a day for the next seven days to test this for yourself and you'll notice you start to feel happier, more socially confident and more connected to the people in your life. And you may even notice that you're happy before you interact and that you're interacting to share that joy with others - that's when the magic happens. It means you've started to acquire the warm glow that popular people take for granted, that attractive quality that draws people to you.

Let's get started and discover the four elements of the Love and Connection Daily Practice.

1. Kindness

The first element of the daily practice is to perform one act of kindness for a stranger. This can be as simple as helping someone by opening a door, letting a busy mom with kids go before you at the checkout or smiling at a stressed out waitress and asking her how she is. It doesn't matter how small or seemingly insignificant the gesture is. That's not the point of this exercise, the point is to be on the look out to help just one person each day. And do it to give not to get. It doesn't matter if the person you help ignores you or fails to even thank you. The reward comes in feeling you are connected to everyone you meet in your day and the knowledge that you can reach out and interact with anyone you choose to connect with.

When this becomes a daily habit you'll notice you are like a superhero always on the look out to make a difference and you'll also be amazed to see how many little opportunities pop up each day where you can make a difference for someone, you'll ultimately stop seeing strangers as distant and removed but as people you've just not connected with yet. You'll also gradually shift from being passive to being more proactive when you meet people, the mall will be a place where you can meet and talk to anyone, the city streets can become meeting places and anywhere you are an opportunity could present itself to show kindness for a stranger.

I guarantee you one thing. If you'll help just one stranger a day with an act of kindness you'll be happier and feel more connected to everyone. You'll also notice that many people are craving for a smile, the chance to talk to someone or just to know that someone cares enough to notice them. When that realization hits you it becomes obvious that almost everyone else is just like you, stuck in that passive attitude of waiting for someone else to make the first move.

(Obviously only approach strangers in safe environments)

2. Gratitude

The second trait to develop is an attitude of gratitude. And specifically, gratitude for the people in your life. You already have people who care about you, want the best for you and appreciate you just for being yourself. Unfortunately we all seem to get caught up in fixating on what's not working, who's let us down and what annoys us about the people closest to us. This then becomes a festering mess of negativity that pollutes our relationships and friendships while making us reluctant to get to know more people - why take on even more aggravation?

To counteract that negative outlook we will work the gratitude muscle, we'll choose to be grateful for ten people in our life. This is very simple, ask yourself - who am I grateful for? Count out ten people. And it's ok to have some or even all the same people on your list each day. And even better, you don't need a good reason or a carefully thought out justification to include someone. Any reason is acceptable. Did someone at work help you to get your project completed on time? Are you grateful you have a brother? Did your neighbor give you a birthday card? You can see what I mean, any reason will do, and in some cases, you may even be grateful someone is in your life without even needing a reason.

This is so simple that many people will miss the whole point of this exercise. It's only when you take a minute each day to consider ten people you are grateful for that you'll see what this can do for you. You'll feel closer to the people in your life and open to meeting more great people. In fact, anytime you want to put a little spring in your step, you can take a moment to ask yourself: who am I grateful for?

3. Love Yourself

This is a key element of the daily practice. The more you love and accept yourself the less you will need the approval and endorsement of those around you and when this happens you will be more relaxed, more present for others and less fearful about sharing your thoughts and feelings. The more you love yourself the more you will allow your true self to shine, you'll be more expressive and your unique authentic personality will attract people to you.

For these reasons it's very important to give ourselves love and approval and I recommend you take a moment each day to ask yourself: what do I love about myself? Keep going until you come up with ten responses and don't worry about having ten profound reasons, any reason you love yourself is a good reason. You might find by doing this each day that many of the same reasons pop

up and that's fine too. What's important is to train yourself to notice that you do care about yourself and to day by day love yourself a little more.

Here are some examples of what you can love about yourself:

- Hair
- Eyes
- Healthy body
- Enthusiasm for life
- Smile
- Positive outlook
- Willingness to support friends
- Commitment to ongoing self improvement
- Can do attitude
- Sense of justice

When you do love yourself more and more you'll notice that people respond to you differently, it's as if there is an energetic glow about you that makes people keen to get to know you better. Even if they can't put a finger on it people will find you more attractive for some reason, they'll take you more seriously and treat you better. You'll also tend to associate more with other people who value themselves, when you love yourself more you won't tolerate poor treatment from negative people, you'll gravitate to happier people like yourself. Your happier self will now repel the difficult people who you endured in the past and draw happy, positive people to you.

Sounds too easy, doesn't it? Yes, it is simple and it works so well because there is a multiplier effect when you practice each element of the daily practice. Test it yourself and you'll see how powerful it can be maintaining a simple daily practice that causes you to feel great and connected to other people.

4. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is another essential quality to pay attention to because if we don't old resentments and suppressed anger will over time create a wall between us and other people. Previous disappointments, failures and rejections can cause us to fear getting to know people and before we know it everyone is a potential source of pain, trouble and problems. Clearly, that's a very poor formula for being at your best when you talk to people.

Like the other elements of the daily practice this only takes a minute or so each day. Simply ask yourself: who can I forgive today? Then, run through ten people you choose to forgive, for your benefit not theirs. There is no need to go into a lengthy analysis and a slow, difficult selection of who to forgive and why, simply pick ten, any ten, and run through them quickly. Your brain has all the memories stored away so, for example, if you decide to forgive Lisa, you know and your unconscious knows why, don't bother diving into the repressed negative feelings from the past.

Do bear in mind that forgiveness is a selfish act, you forgive for your sake and being forgiving has nothing to do with helping or harming anyone else, it's a gift you give yourself so you can be happier and more positive going forward and less cautious about meeting new people. The more you put the past behind you the less baggage and distortion you'll bring to the present so you'll be better able to see people as they are instead of cynically viewing people as potential problems if you don't keep them at arms length.

After a few days of practicing forgiveness for a minute or so a day you'll notice how much lighter and freer you feel as you forgive people who've wronged you in the past, this letting go is a great feeling. At this stage if you choose you can forgive people in the moment. Let's say you get poor customer service instead of getting annoyed maybe you'll choose to take a moment to silently forgive the person. Ironically, your resulting calmness makes you more effective at dealing with the situation since a calm mind produces better solutions than an angry one. When you live like this you'll be a master of forgiveness and someone who quickly turns every annoying interaction into an opportunity to forgive and feel better in a matter of moments while still resolving issues that need to be dealt with.

And best of all, forgiveness allows the possibility of connecting with more agreeable people because you never shut down out of resentment and overwhelm after talking to difficult people. You are in charge of how you feel and how you interact so you can simply move on and meet friendlier people who appreciate and respect you.

Conclusion

In this section we've looked at four key elements which when developed together will make a dramatic difference to your ability to let your personality shine while also enabling you to connect much more easily with others. Kindness, gratitude, loving yourself and forgiveness provide the solid foundation you need to truly be at peace with yourself and others. A few minutes a day will make the world of difference if you follow this simple daily practice. Why? Because in time this practice cultivates new habits that form the basis of how you live and interact all day long.

I have an easy challenge for you. Practice the daily practice for the next 7 days. Take a few minutes a day and simply notice what happens. It might surprise you that something so simple once applied can make such a big difference in your acceptance of yourself and others and in your growing ability to enjoy talking and connecting with the people in your day to day life.

Then, if you continue with the daily practice, after a few weeks this new outlook will become habitual, it'll becomes the new normal for you. If someone is rude, you silently forgive them in the moment and let it go while still asserting yourself when it's necessary. If you notice that someone needs a helping hand you step up to commit an act of kindness, if you feel beaten up by the difficulties of the day you pause and notice who you are grateful for and immediately you start to feel lighter and more at peace. If you feel lonely or in need of a good chat you reflect on what you love about yourself, you start to feel happier and you feel that warmth that can fuel a good connection with whoever you choose to reach out to.

The momentum that builds from a few key daily actions is truly impressive. It's the brick upon brick progress that creates magnificent skyscrapers, it's the one word after another momentum that writes literary classics and it's the note by note to record songs that are loved by millions. A simple daily practice can transform your ability to connect with people, all you need to do is perform the simple daily actions and let momentum take care of the rest.

For your convenience here is a summary of the daily practice.

Love and Connection Daily Practice:

1 Perform one act of kindness for a stranger
2 Who am I grateful for? List 10 people.
3 What do I love about myself? List 10 traits.
4 Who can I forgive today? List 10 people.

* * *

Part 2 - Conversation Skills Tips and Strategies

What is the best way to approach someone and start a conversation? That is the big question I am asked again and again. Sometimes people ask me to provide a script that will always work in every situation.

I'm sorry I don't have a magic wand that can grant you this wish. I can however share some fundamental principles that do work every single time. Once you have mastered these fundamentals you will be relaxed and creative enough to start a conversation with ease even with a wide range of different people.

I discovered these fundamentals after years of trial and error followed by fascinating times observing and learning from true masters - those people who can happily approach anyone with a big smile without a moments hesitation.

* * *

How to Approach Someone to Start a Conversation

1. Decide to like people

Unless people give you a reason not to, assume that anyone you meet is likable and worth talking to. Popular people genuinely love meeting people. They enjoy getting to know new people and their default setting is: "I love meeting people".

Very often shy people assume others do not want to talk to them or that they will be criticized when they share their thoughts and feelings. In other words shy people often paint such a negative picture of others that it becomes almost impossible to approach anyone.

Notice what is happening here. The reserved person is starting from a "I don't like people in case they don't like me" point of view. This negative outlook creates a barrier that stops anyone from starting a conversation - you or the other person.

Popular people start off with a very different outlook - "I like you unless you give me a reason not to like you!"

2. Know that your happiness does not depend on how someone else responds

Your happiness is entirely under your control. It does not depend on whether someone else is responsive to you. You might think you will feel terrible if people aren't keen to get to know you. That is based on a false assumption - you assume happiness is about what happens outside of you but it's not. Whether you are happy or not is a question of how you think and feel and has nothing to do with the reactions of others unless you decide to live with that false belief.

If you approach someone and you get a negative response it can only mean one of two possibilities. First, you need to improve your approach, and, second, that person is not interested in getting to know you right now in this moment. And that could be for many reasons that have nothing to do with who you are.

Decide that you are happy whether or not someone else is rude, having a bad day or too tired or hungry to spend time getting to know you. See that happiness starts with your own attitude and that its not dependent on the reaction of someone you have never meet before.

3. Know the response you want and adjust your approach until you get it

This follows on from the points above. Always be objective about how you are doing. Never take failure personally, never take set backs in a social setting as evidence that you are not worth talking to.

Imagine you are a neutral observer. What does this person see? What would he suggest to help you improve your approach? Notice what you are doing well and use that as the basis for ongoing improvement.

If you want people to smile and laugh and it's not happening its time to change your approach. Objectively review what you have been doing and then find a role model if you still do not know a better way to get a positive reaction. Find someone who always has people smiling and laughing. Then view his approach as a step by step process to copy.

You can always observe popular people and notice what they are doing differently to you. Copy what works and you will do much better when meeting people. Use an effective approach and you'll be effective!

4. Forget about 100% success

When I first started getting much better at meeting people I had very high standards for how well I should do. And having a positive high expectations outlook is great. That is, as long as you know you will never hit perfection.

There is this fantasy in self help that you can discover the one key approach that works every time in every situation with no effort whatsoever on you part. If you get that you'll enjoy 100% success while living in a state of bliss that never leaves you!
If this was true we would find evidence of it in the real world. Maybe if we looked at the lives of the most brilliant people to ever walk this earth we could learn this magical secret. Unfortunately the lives of the great leaders, creatives and geniuses of the past show us that not even they enjoyed 100% success.

That's why I'm saying to you to forget about 100% success. Aim to always improve and to enjoy seeing how good you can get but forget about hitting 100%. This attitude of always improving without demanding perfection means you are under much less pressure when you approach and meet people. Less pressure means less tension and when you relax you'll do much better.

Finally, if your goal is to do your best and to improve you know you will succeed in learning something. See how a change in attitude means you can't go wrong approaching people? You either do great or you learn something that helps you become great.

* * *

9 Great Ways to Confidently Approach Anyone

If you are not confident by nature the simple task of starting a conversation with someone new is enough to start the heart racing!

Yes, you read it correctly! Cold sweats, heart palpitations, shaking and stuttering are just some of the effects that the faint-hearted can be faced with whilst starting a conversation.

This can all be avoided by following these simple yet effective tips to help your confidence soar.

1. Shyness doesn't pay. Being timid and shying away amongst the crowd really doesn't pay off these days. While sitting amongst your friends and listening to their conversations, teach yourself to not only be a listener but to participate more.

2. Make sure that you contribute and offer your response to the conversation. By doing this you will in time gain confidence to start conversation topics with strangers, not just with those you are familiar with.

3. Preparation is the key! One of the qualities that make a great public speaker is the simple yet effective ability to be listened to! While alone stand in front of the mirror, practice speaking, stand straight and tall, and talk at a good volume (not shouting).

4. An assertive voice of authority will help to draw people to listen to you. In fact they won't have the choice not to!

5. Make all eyes on you! If the person that you wish to start a conversation with has their back to you, don't wait for them to turn around: say their name or say hello to help draw their attention. By doing this you will help to get them listening to you. You will appear confident (even if inside you have butterflies)!

6. Revise beforehand! - I don't mean turn into a nerd, you don't have to write it down and take a pen to paper. However you can simply have a map of your thoughts in your head, with the topic of conversation clearly planned out. Then on opening your mouth the words will flow, you won't be stuck in a mess of thoughts and ideas and you will be able to take the conversation just where you want it to go!

7. Communication is a YES! Learn to understand that the very way that you communicate with people will be the deciding factor of just how successful you will be in this life. Use every interaction as an opportunity to improve. The very skill of being able to start a good conversation will help to take your life to higher limits!

8. Sit and think are there any successful people in your life that are not able to start a conversation? Can you live your life in the shadows of others? See that success and happiness depends on being able to get along well with people.

9. Nerves are what you make them! Teach yourself that nerves really are what you make of them. Don't allow nerves to escalate and hold you back. Many people have difficulty in starting a conversation with a stranger so don’t be so hard on yourself.

Every one struggles in conversation at times, if you are able to take note and learn the skills mentioned above then starting a conversation needn't be stressful. Don't be nervous. Learn that the people you are trying to strike a conversation with are probably just as nervous as you are.

Many people lack the confidence to start a conversation, or perhaps fear talking to the opposite sex. This is a very limited way of thinking, negative thoughts such as they will laugh at me, they won't find me interesting, etc are really just that. Be positive! Negativity doesn't get you anywhere.

* * *

How to Stop Feeling Nervous When Meeting New People

It's understandable that you might be nervous meeting new people. After all, you don't know them so you don't know what they will think about you or how they will react to you. That can be a worrying thing.

However, there are plenty of things you can do to get over your nervousness and start to enjoy meeting new people.

1. Don't feel you have to impress

You don't. Have you ever met someone or maybe seen them on TV where they are trying really hard to impress? It's just not impressive! This kind of approach appears fake and being fake will make people wary of you.

Remember that the people you are meeting are human too: no better or worse than you. They are also unlikely to be judging you as harshly as you fear!

2. Don't go alone if you don't have to

In many situations, it is perfectly reasonable for you to take a friend with you, unless it is something like a job interview or a professional meeting. Having a friend by your side can help because when things get difficult they can boost your confidence with a few words and maybe even just a smile.

The very fact that they are your friend and wanted to go with you to support you should make you feel better. It shows that you have good qualities that people like about you.

3. Take a few deep breaths and smile

You are in control of how you feel. You have the power to calm yourself down. You may be surprised that if you take a moment to breathe deeply that will release the tension in your body and clear your head.

Once you can think clearly, you should be able to see that the situation is not as threatening as you perceived it to be.

4. Go prepared

If you are nervous meeting new people, you may find that it is difficult to know what to say. Pre-empt this situation by preparing a few conversation openers or points you want to make. Write them on a postcard and take it with you to help as a prompt.

5. Dress comfortably

If you feel good about how you look, you will be more confident when you meet new people. You will feel that it is one less thing on which they could judge you negatively.

So, dress appropriately for the situation, and think about wearing favorite clothes or jewelry that you know you look your best in, or even buying something new for the occasion.

6. Stay true to yourself

This is not always easy to do, especially when you feel that the people you are meeting may not like you for who you are. However, you are going to have to live with yourself after this meeting, so regardless of whether people like you or not, it is much more important that you like yourself and that you are happy with how you behaved.

7. Accept that some people won't like you

You don't like everyone. You disapprove of the things that some people do. That is fine. But by the same token, don't expect everyone to like you!

There will no doubt be people whose morals and opinions you dislike. That doesn't necessarily make them bad people; they are just not your type of people. You are free to dislike some people and that does them no damage whatsoever. The same is true of people disliking you. It doesn't do you any harm, and you may well not like the ways in which you would have to change yourself to get their approval. It's not worth it.

Liking yourself is far more important than having other people like you, fortunately, if you like yourself, you are more likely to have people like you. That knowledge, put into practice in these few steps, should help you to not be so nervous meeting new people.

* * *

What to Say When Introducing Yourself to New People

It is said that first impressions are lasting impressions, so what to say when introducing yourself to someone can be critically important. You want to come across as friendly, yet not excessively so; talkative, yet not dominate the conversation.

Here are some ways to find a balance and introduce yourself in a way that gives a good first impression:

1. Mention a mutual friend

When you are in the situation where you want to meet someone but you're unsure about how to break the ice, ask yourself if the two of you have a friend in common.

Even if that person is not there, you can walk up to the person and say, "Don't you know so-and-so?" When they say yes, you can then use that as a springboard to introducing yourself to them.

2. Dive right in

On the other hand, if you see someone at a place (bar, social gathering, church meeting), and you do not know them at all, the direct approach can be the best. You just walk right up to the person and say, "How do you do? My name is (fill in the blank)" After that, you can then launch into what it is you want to talk to them about.

3. The business deal

If you are looking to talk to the person about a business matter, the key is to get to the point; you're not going to win points by engaging in chitchat. Step up to the person, offer them your hand for a firm handshake, and say, "Good day, Mr/Ms (blank); my name is (blank). Could I speak to you for a moment?"

4. The flirt

When it comes to chasing a man or woman in a social setting for the purposes of a date, you want to be fun and flirty, but not lame.

In years gone past something like, "Hey, baby, what's your (astrological) sign?" was the height of cool. A much better approach these days is the compliment. Or, if you're in a museum or at a party or some other social setting, compliment something in the room.

In the case of the former, something like, "You have such lovely eyes." Or if the person is very professional, "That is a sharp suit; where'd you get it?" would go down well. You can also always offer to buy them a drink.

With the latter situations, you could point out a very interesting piece of artwork in the room or some other pleasant feature and say, "That piece of art is lovely; what do you think?"

In a place like a bookstore, asking someone their opinion about a new book can also be a good way of introducing yourself to them: "I hear the new (blank) just came out. Have you read it?"

5. Reminding them

If you've met someone in the past, but they don't remember you, the subtle reminder is what to say when introducing yourself to someone.

You could say, "I know you; we met at (fill in the blank)." If they don't remember you, you simply tell them your name and mention details of your previous interaction.

6. Asking for directions

This can be most helpful when you want to meet someone in a totally generic location.

You see a man or woman in a diner, outside a store, on the street, and so on. With no hint as to their personality, stepping up to them and saying, "Excuse me, do you know where (blank) is?" can be a good icebreaker.

Next time you're meeting someone for the first time, it can be an easy process. The key to knowing what to say when introducing yourself to someone is gauging the situation, and making use of these simple tips.

* * *

6 Easy Ways to Avoid Getting Stuck for Words

Have you ever been faced with that tongue tied feeling of hopelessness? You most certainly are not alone. Nearly everyone will have at some time become stuck for words.

How can you stop this from happening? Simply follow the easy steps below. You'll gain confidence and ensure you always know what to say.

Here are some great tips to stop that tongue tied feeling and loss of conversational skills:

1. Finish previous topics of conversation

That tongue tied feeling, more often than not can come from having a brain full of ideas, and not finishing previous topics of conversation. Make sure that you finish each and every conversation on your agenda.

Don't leave it till your brain is a factory of unfinished topics of talk. This really doesn't help you in making good conversation.

2. Observe before talking

Some of the best conversation makers are successful because they have the ability to listen, and not just to be listened to! So if you are feeling tongue tied and there's a knot at the tip of your tongue trapping the words, sit back and watch how other people are talking!

It's a short study period and will help you considerably in your method of approaching a conversation. Once you can see what people enjoy talking about its easy to rejoin the conversation.

3. If it doesn't make sense then don't say it!

Half the time you get tongue tied, this feeling comes as you are talking nonsense that really is not relevant to anyone!

Make sure that the words are necessary and that the topic needs to be addressed. Just by following this simple method of untying your tongue you will maintain an audience of listeners.

4. Ignore those whose ears don't tune in!

If their ears don't listen then don't be disheartened. The same way that you are struggling to be heard, there are people that struggle in the listening process! If your words are falling on deaf ears you can't help it. Some people really are limited in thought and you can't draw their attention span with your words.

5. Practice before you speak

Start putting in to practice the words that are in your head; perhaps you could ask a family member to sit down and listen to you before you decide to go public with the conversation.

By doing this you will have had a test run period, this will be a practice for the real thing (a stage rehearsal) helping you to focus and more importantly be focused on.

6. Before talking take a deep breath

A small change such as taking a deep breath of fresh air before talking will help you to maintain focus and remain head strong on the topic of attention.

Half the time when you start to go off road in your thoughts and the speech starts to become difficult to come out, this is a result of not being relaxed. This process of breathing in helps you to feel more relaxed, enabling you to remain focused.

Being tongue tied and losing your words in conversation really is a result of carelessness. If you can stick to the above tips and methods of untying your tongue then you can help to make sure that you don't get lost for words!

Try to remember that thinking about being lost for words can lead you to the reality of being lost for words. Everyone gets tongue tied, and you really can't have lived much without having that tongue tied feeling occasionally.

Stay confident, be calm and don't let nervous thoughts fill your brain just focus on yourself and the words that you need to express!

* * *

10 Interesting Topics of Conversation for Every Occasion

Don't panic! You can be interesting. Interesting topics of conversation needn't be difficult to think of. Consider this: what makes a topic interesting? Isn't it that people like to talk about it and that they have opinions on it?

Once you realize that, you'll see that interesting topics of conversation come from everyday life and things that we all have in common. Then you'll realize it's not so difficult to think of them.

Don't think you have to be controversial and go for risky topics like politics and religion; you don't. In fact, to do so would be a mistake.

Whatever topic you choose should make people relaxed and happy to talk; controversial subjects don't allow that. Think instead about what all people share: families, hopes, dreams, experiences etc.

Here are a few interesting topics of conversation to get you started:

1. Who is the most interesting person you ever met? You can see how this would easily lead people to voice opinions and ask 'why?'.

2. Where in the world would you most like to visit? This dream location may be shared by others and so it makes people feel solidarity, but also, people will be itching to ask 'why?' and keep the conversation flowing.

3. What has been the most life-changing experience you've ever had? Here, people can share funny and touching stories if they want to, which will help you get a deeper understanding of them. Likewise, if people don't feel relaxed enough to give a heartfelt reply they can answer in an entertaining way and it all adds to the conversation.

4. What is the most spontaneous thing you've ever done? That opens the door to all sorts of humorous and romantic stories.

5. Who's had the biggest influence on your life? Because this person has influenced the person you're asking, they must view them positively and have strong feelings about them. That means they're likely to enjoy talking about them.

6. What dream would you most like to make a reality? This kind of inspirational question always gets people talking and everyone's usually happy to chip in with comments about people's hopes and wishes. Just be careful when commenting that you don't rain on their parade. It's their right to have whatever hopes they want.

7. What is the best quality you've inherited from either of your parents? This is particularly interesting at a family gathering when people know the parents you're talking about. It's also a bit of a bonding experience, speaking favorably about your parents.

8. From which person have you learned most in your life? This is another uplifting, positive topic of conversation that usually gets people talking.

9. Which historical figures do you most identify with? This lets you know something about the other people around you; it also opens up discussion of the events these historical figures were involved in. Yes, potentially it takes you into dangerous waters of politics and religion but people usually take this question in the spirit of fun in which it's meant, so potentially awkward moments are easily averted.

10. What kind of music do you like? You could then go on to talk of music you've bought or gigs you've been too. You might even ask: 'what's the most embarrassing album in your collection?' That's usually met with all-round hilarity!

These ideas should show you that interesting topics of conversation don't need to be complex or intellectual, in fact, the more ordinary the better, because then people feel qualified to talk about the topic.

* * *

The Best Questions to Keep a Conversation Going

You've done the most difficult part; you have started a conversation and you have got some response from the person you are talking to. That is not the end of the need for questions within the conversation though. A conversation needs to be a bit like a tennis match, where exchanges go to and fro like the tennis ball in a rally.

You need questions to keep a conversation going. Questions help to progress the conversation and allow you to find out more about someone; they make it possible to gain understanding. And questions work well to bring in quiet people, to keep a lively conversation flowing and to include everyone.

Questions to Progress a Conversation:

These questions help the conversation along by relating to what you have been talking about and taking it to a greater depth. The question should be easy to answer, include everyone and not cause offense to anyone. Some examples would be:

If talking about sport:

1. What did you think of their last game?

This is particularly useful when you have established a mutual liking for a sport with the person that you are talking to. Perhaps you have even discovered that you both support the same team.

2. What do you think of their chances of winning this season?

Again, this is great if you like the same sports and at least know which team(s) you are talking about.

3. Have you got membership of a club or a gym?

This shouldn't seem like you are suggesting they need one, but if you have discovered a mutual interest in keeping fit or saunas or something like that, you may find you belong to the same health club; or perhaps if you don't you could progress the friendship by taking up a club membership together so that you will meet regularly doing something you both enjoy.

4. What sports do you like to take part in as well as watch?

This question is useful because you react quite differently to sports as a participant rather than simply a spectator.

If talking about pets:

1. Have you ever entered a pet show?

This is useful if the person you are talking to seems particularly proud of their dog, cat , etc. You can then go on to chat about the experience of participating in these shows or preparing the pet for it. It may even lead to some humorous stories along the way.

2. Why did you choose that particular breed?

People will love the chance to reveal the wonders of their particular chosen breed of pet.

3. Was your pet easy to train?

Again, this can lead to funny stories if you find that they have trained their pet in some way; it could be as simple as house-training; it doesn't have to involve elaborate circus tricks.

If talking about fashion:

1. Have you got a favorite perfume that you tend to buy?

2. What's your favorite clothes store?

3. Which celebrity's fashion style do you like?

4. Have you got a favorite item of clothing that makes you feel really good when you wear it?

Fashion works well as a topic for women especially. It can lead on to talk of celebrities and/or embarrassing fashion mistakes. It should be lighthearted and you may also find out you like the same celebrities which can lead on to a discussion of their art form or sport.

Talking about children:

People love to talk about their children. You'll find this an easy one if you discover the other person has children.

1. What hobbies do they have?

2. Do they get on well with each other?

3. Which school do they go to?

Talking about food:

None of us can live without food and for most of us it is a real pleasure which will remind you of happy times.

1. What is your favorite meal?

2. Do you have a favorite restaurant?

3. What style of cooking do you like the most?

4. Do you have any favorite recipes?

You will see that some of these questions are closed questions which, strictly speaking, could be answered with a one word 'yes' or 'no' answer; but realistically, because the topics are easy and because they are subjects about which people are likely to have an opinion about, they are likely to relax and say much more than one word.

Questions to Include Quiet People:

To draw a quiet person into a conversation you need to show some sensitivity; they may not like much attention drawn to them; they may not, however, speak, unless you address them directly by name, so that is a useful technique. Make the question an easy one to answer, such as 'You saw that movie too, didn't you? What did you think of it?'

Don't put people under pressure to answer but if you use an appropriate question and leave a pause for them to answer, more often than not, they'll answer. Good questions follow on from the topic being discussed and allow a person to give a simple answer based on their personal opinion, rather than requiring them to possess any particular knowledge.

* * *

How to Shine in Conversation with Listening Skills

Do you have good listening skills? Listening happens to be a key strength of good communicators. If you want to develop good listening skills, there are some steps you have to follow:

1) It would help if you feel empathy for the other party when you are listening. You will be able to absorb what the other person is saying better if you have empathy because the content will be close to your heart.

2) Empathy is also important because if you have empathy, you will be able to form an association between the knowledge you value in your head and the content of the message of the other person. Look for the deeper meaning people express behind the words they use and you'll find commonality in values, opinions and outlook.

3) Avoid judging the delivery of the message and the person delivering the message, if possible. This allows you to focus on the content of the message rather than on the style of delivery.

4) You can rely on some techniques to improve your level of comprehension of a spoken message. For example, you can ask the other person to repeat his message or certain parts of it. Then you can rephrase the message content in your own words and ask the other party if what you understood is correct.

5) Maintain an active body state. If you are alert, it will be easier to fight any distractions that would prevent you from comprehending the message.

6) Aim to get as much detail as you can from the person about the message. This means asking intelligent and pertinent questions. Then restate the message in your own words so you can determine how much you absorbed and understood.

7) It helps if you are genuinely interested in the other person and the message. If you are bored (both with the person and the message), it will definitely show both in your body language and your replies. If you are not interested in either the person or the message, etiquette dictates that you excuse yourself politely and go somewhere else so that you will not waste your time or the time of the other person.

8) Ever heard the phrase 'one touch is equal to a thousand words'? Well, basically what that means is, your body language can convey a lot of meaning. Study the body language of the other person so you can get the nonverbal cues he is sending. He might be irritable, sad, happy, or angry. All these emotions are subtly conveyed by his body language, not just by a spoken message.

9) To keep the conversational ball rolling, make an effort to ask the other party what his point of view or opinions are. Not only is this polite, you might learn something valuable in the process.

10) You should also let the other person know what your own perspective or opinions are. Aim to make these specific rather than couch them in broad terms so that the other party knows exactly where you stand. This will reduce instances of miscommunication.

11) If the other person has offended you somehow, be vocal about your displeasure but do not get angry. Control your emotions so that the situation does not worsen.

12) Maintain an objective stance regarding your reactions and the consequences of the actions of the other person. This means being able to take a step back and view the situation from an objective point of view.

13) Do not try to own the conversation by dominating the flow and ignoring attempts by the other person to be heard. Try to dominate the other person and you will find you will get fewer and fewer people who want to talk to you.

14) If the other party uses emotion-laden words, sieve through the message without reacting automatically to the emotion. This will help defuse a potentially volatile situation.

15) Follow-up any resolution to the situation. If you and the other party have agreed on something, schedule a second or even third meeting to smooth out any remaining rough spots.

These tips are just some of the ways to bolster your listening skills. Test these ideas and you will see the big difference they can make.

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How to Use Body Language to Read People Like a Book

When we first meet new people, we all feel a little awkward and self-conscious until we feel that we understand the other person a little. Until we can do that, we can't work out what people think of us and that often leaves us in an uncomfortable position of uncertainty.

The key to getting comfortable again and to understanding other people, is to read the other person's key body language signals; believe it or not, this is possible even from the very first few seconds when you meet that new person.

1. Eye contact is very important in communication, especially with new people. Good use of eye contact, which does not avoid others, does not stare and does not linger on certain parts of the other's anatomy inappropriately, is a crucial part of getting to understand new people.

Appropriate eye contact shows respect and it shows that you are interested in interacting with the other person. How much eye contact to make differs between cultures but if you read the other person's body signals correctly you will see how much eye contact to make by matching their degree of eye contact.

2. Posture says a lot about a person's personality and mood. Slouching shoulders and a curved spine, as well as helping someone to develop round shoulders over time, says that they are depressed, down, and lacking confidence in themselves. That kind of posture can become a self-fulfilling prophecy as it soon begins to affect a person's mood negatively.

3. The tilt of a person's head betrays their mood too. A head which is balanced both horizontally and vertically on the neck oozes confidence and self-esteem. You will find yourself more inclined to listen to a person who has this kind of posture when speaking.

When they want to speak or make a particular point, the authoritative, confident person will usually lean their head forward just a little bit, but without encroaching too much on the personal space of their listener. If they tilt their head to one side while you're talking, you can be assured that they are listening to you attentively and that they will be likely to give you time to speak and say what you have to say.

Of course, this position can change, and it should. No one position should be maintained for too long as that will seem unnatural and can be off-putting to the other person. If someone stays in one position and doesn't speak for a long time, check: have they fallen asleep! That is the impression you would probably be left with!

4. The placement of a person's arms says a lot about their personality and mood. Wild gesticulations will imply over-excitement or even aggression. You will feel most comfortable when you can see that the person you are speaking too is feeling comfortable too; therefore, look for arms that are held naturally at the sides of the body. They may also be held behind the back.

Either posture implies an open personality, a person who is feeling confident and who is ready to face challenges. If you upset or offend someone, watch out for their arms being crossed over their chest defensively. That's a real giveaway that they are feeling hurt.

5. Legs tell you a lot about the person you're speaking with, even when you have just met them. It's quite difficult to get your legs to do exactly what you want them to do, so they say a lot about a person's innermost feelings, even when they are trying very hard to hide them. Leg swinging and rolling of the foot at the ankle, or especially foot tapping, shows that a person is feeling irritated or impatient. The faster the movement, the worse their mood!

6. You will probably be able to sense right away if someone is deliberately angling their body away from you, even if you don't consciously process that thought. People tend to sit angled towards and even leaning towards, people they like. This may not happen when you first meet someone, as they may wait a little while to gauge what you are like, but if they start to position themselves in your direction and lean in closer to you, then the chances are that they are beginning to like you.

So, even if you don't know a person well, you can read their body language and adapt your communication with them accordingly.

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Show People You Like Them and Make Friends with Ease

Within the first thirty-seconds of meeting someone for the first time, we make many observations which we translate into judgments about that person we are meeting. Every human being does this. We do this naturally and automatically with little, if any, real awareness of this process.

This means that if we all do it, those we come into contact with are observing and making judgments about us, like we are about them. If you happen to demonstrate a disliking attitude this information will present itself within those first few moments, in most interactions.

For this reason we must know how we come across to people when first meeting them. If we come across in a positive way people we will attracted to us because, as in the law of physics, positive attracts and negative repels. If you want to show people you like them present your positive self.

1. To present your positive self requires you to pay attention to how and what verbal and nonverbal communication you use. The messages you send through both of these types of communication say a lot about your desire to like the person you are meeting for the first time. If you send any negative messages, within those first seconds, you may never get the chance to show them later that you like them. Remember, people will make judgments about you within the first thirty-seconds of meeting you, like you will them. Two of those first evaluations each of you will make is: "Do I like this person?" and "Does this person like me?"

2. Whenever showing people you like them it's important to look like you are friendly. Appearing friendly can mean different things to different people, but most of us respond well to a smile and some form of a "how are you?", no matter who we are. Most of us also respond to other positive statements as well, especially about things that relate directly to us. We all enjoy the feeling of appreciation. Compliments, mixed with the appropriate body-language, about someone's appearance, for example, can send a message of liking something about that person.

3. One of the quickest ways to let someone know you are not interested in them is to make "me" statements. Avoid any form of a "me" statement, within those first few moments of an interaction because they can send the message that the other person is not the center of your interests. If the other person perceives that they are not the center of your interests they could possibly think that you don't like them. Additionally, if you are talking about you it will be impossible to show the other person that you like them.

4. When you want to show someone you like them focus on them. Become interested in what they are saying or even doing. Attentively listen to them as they speak and become involved with their conversation. As they talk, paraphrase and ask them pertinent questions regarding what they are saying. If they are busy doing something and it looks like they could use some help, offer to help them. Both listening and helping are other ways to show people you like them.

The demonstration that we like someone can also be expressed in our concern for them. Most people like it when another person cares about them. Asking the person, you've seen in the store every morning for the past week, about their family or work are examples of concern for that person. The act of concern shows people you like them.

To wrap up, make a point of being positive, friendly and focused on the other person. Be concerned about their welfare and help them when you can. When you deal with new people in this way you'll find that people warm to you quickly and they are keen to get to know you better.

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